Hints and tricks in the scientific publication

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Authorship

• All authors should have contributed to:
  – Hypothesis
  – Design
  – Data collection
  – Interpretation and manuscript revision

Engage your co-authors actively from the start

• First author is the boss
• Senior author
• First 6 authors, et al. >6 authors
• Authorship agreed upon prior to data collection
• Co-authors can present the paper
• Acknowledgements may help limit authorship
• Corresponding author

Congress abstracts

• a rapid communication for an oral or visual public presentation
• not a summary of a paper
  • a single message
  • can be interpreted on its own
  • select topic/category very carefully
  • 1 study may support several abstracts
  • key words are unimportant
  • follow instructions exactly
  • title is most important, should be written first and revised last
  • remember the theme of a chosen topic
  • use recommended subheadings
  • design tables simply
  • avoid busy figures
  • use all space provided
  • an abstract should always lead to a full manuscript

Poster

• more relaxed than an oral presentation and more fun
• it is the publication and reference that counts on your CV
• be available to elaborate and argue
• use the opportunity to network
• stay modest, visitors usually know more than you do
• view criticism as free peer review for your paper
• talk to your neighbours
Hints and tricks in the scientific publication

- look at it from 2 meters away while walking
- title must summarise results and is the only part read by 99%
- as little text as possible, telegraph style is best
- indicate participating centres clearly
- illustrations must be simple and very large with clear titles
- people like colours and big fonts
- not too fancy, it is science not show business
- blow-up conclusions
- attach the accepted abstract

Submission
- try a high impact journal if you have time and the paper is strong
- know the journal’s special interests, style and readership
- read some papers
- do not divide findings from 1 study into several papers
- one strong paper is better than two weak papers
- read “instructions to authors” several times

Abstract as a summary for a manuscript
- very different from a congress abstract
- important exercise and should be written before the paper
- briefly summarise the aims and major findings
- invitation to read the paper
- less data necessary
- detailed information is contained in the paper
- may be very short, no tables
- use a lot of time on the impact and conclusion
- make the English perfect, reviewers’ first impression

Title Page
- Presentation is important and demonstrates clarity and organisational skills
- Corresponding author should be first author
- Indicate financial support

Manuscripts

Title
- Most important part of the paper, write it first, make it concise and provocative
- Make a statement that will wake up the reader
- Show it to your colleagues

Introduction
- short (1-3 paragraphs max)
- background and hypothesis
- why the study needs to be done

Methodology
- adequate information, too much detail is better than too little
- describe study design and patient population thoroughly
- get the statistics section right, show it to a statistician

Results
- make it readable and easily digested
- concise short text, repeat same format for reporting
- well-designed illustrations
- refer to tables and only repeat essential data in text
- place references to figures and tables appropriately

Discussion
- use logical headings
- brief review of your results with few numbers
- review current literature and compare or contrast your findings
- interpret results
- speculate on mechanisms
- include limitations section
- separate implications from conclusions
- “appropriate conservatism”

References
- should be current and accurate, they reveal your efforts to the reviewer
- do not use too many of your own references
- do not use reviews, rather the original paper
- editors choose reviewers from senior authors in the reference list

Final touches
- double space
- spell check, show to an Englishman
- if you do not know an Englishman, send it to a Scot or an American
- make the paper and illustrations look good
- presentation counts
- a clean appearance implies organized work
- prepare and mail by express in a clean package to the journal
- follow electronic submission rules exactly
- revise carefully according to co-authors’ comments
- highlight changes, do not touch “accept all changes” button
- resist time pressure
- put it on the shelf for 3 weeks, “cold eye”
- then read it like you have never seen it before

Cover letter
- invest time in the letter
- by the first author on hospital paper
- get the Editor’s name and address right
- well-written, immediately displays your language skills to the editor
The review is based on the lecture presented during the workshop titled: “Clinical research methodology in heart failure” on the Heart Failure Congress in Lisbon, Portugal, 11-14 June 2005.